

NEWS RELEASE

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DeNUCCI SAYS REPORTING DELAYS WEAKEN CHILD LEAD POISONING PREVENTION PROGRAM

State Auditor Joe DeNucci said today that the failure of private laboratories to promptly report lead poisoning test results to the state Department of Public Health (DPH) has prevented lead poisoned children from gaining timely admittance to treatment programs.

According to DeNucci's audit of DPH's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (CLPPP), the private labs participating in the program averaged 14 days to report test results, despite state regulations requiring results to be reported within a week. In fact, four facilities, who averaged 25 days to forward their findings, neglected to report 13 known cases of lead poisoned children to the state within three business days as required by state regulations.

"These reporting delays defeat the purpose of the lead poisoning prevent program and pose a threat to the health of children with elevated levels of lead poisoning," DeNucci said. "Case records show that blood lead levels decline steadily when children are diagnosed promptly, admitted to DPH's program and treated. Therefore, it is critical that test results be reported within the required time period."

Under state law, CLPPP provides mandatory screening for the early identification of lead poisoning in children between 12 months and six years of age. Blood specimens drawn from these children are sent to either the state laboratory or private facilities for analysis. The private laboratories then submit their results to the state, where the information is merged with data that has already been gathered by the Commonwealth.

A study conducted for the New England Journal of Medicine disclosed that lead poisoning is particularly harmful to the developing brain and nervous system of young children, with youngsters who have been exposed to high amounts of the substance dropping between three to five IQ points.

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"Timely reporting is essential to the effectiveness of the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program," noted DeNucci. "The Department of Public Health, the state laboratory

and the private labs all should coordinate their efforts to ensure that there is compliance with regulations.”

DPH officials agreed with Auditor DeNucci’s assessment of the situation and said that new electronic reporting requirements that are now being introduced will significantly reduce the delays that have plagued the program. Monthly meetings have also been started so that all parties will have a clearer understanding of their respective responsibilities.

“The Department of Public Health’s positive response will help ensure that this very important program will be able to better protect the children of the Commonwealth,” concluded DeNucci.

